

**Our Virgin Birth or the Reinventions of Europe**  
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**Part I:**  
**Europe's Post-Imperial Condition**

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As he prepares to fly to Venus at the start of his adventures in 1950, Dan Dare, who was to become the greatest comic book hero of post-war Britain, enters a Whitehall-of-the-future dominated by an immense towering statue of a certain John Strachey. Why the honor? Strachey had been a senior member of the 1945 Labor government. But his greatest claim to popular fame (or infamy) was *The Groundnuts Scheme*, a dream which spoke to the spirit of the times. It was born in Strachey's mind when, as a senior wartime RAF Staff Officer, he had seen the great allied armada sailing through the Straits of Gibraltar in November 1942 carrying the British and American Armies and their vast quantities of tanks, vehicles, munitions and supplies, to the shores of North Africa for the *Operation Torch Landings*. Strachey later wrote of how the spectacle inspired him with the thought that the course of history might again be changed if a second such armada was to sail to the shores of Africa, but this time carrying mighty shipments of tractors, ploughshares, fertilizers and armies of engineers and agricultural experts. It would thereby - in the most literal sense - plant the seeds of a huge productive potential, which might sustain a continuing independent world role for Britain. The background assumption - shortly unmasked as a delusion - that European rule would remain in Africa for generations to come - was unrelentingly shared on the mainland of Europe. Yet ironically it was such fantasies, whether dressed up by the traditional imperialist Right under the slogan of 'the Third British Empire' or projected in progressive guise by Strachey as laying the geopolitical foundations for an International Socialist Commonwealth that contributed to keeping Britain aloof from the emerging European integration project. Meanwhile, those engaged in that project hoped to implement the same dream, with or without Britain: a dream for which the shorthand expression Eurafrica came into being - pooling sovereignty in Europe and pooling colonial administration in Africa as two sides of the same coin (Hansen and Jonsson, 2013, 2015).

Strachey's dream never came to be. Groundnuts proved to be a fiasco and Eurafrika was forgotten. With decolonization and the cold war, Europeans redirected their energy within. And while the modern nation-state versions of the erstwhile imperial metropolises remained shaped by their colonial pasts, Europe in its incarnation as the EEC and later the EU, sought to capitalize on the myth of its virgin birth and in the process redefine itself as a post-imperial peace project: post-imperial *within*, as no longer shall big European states bully smaller states into submission; post-imperial *without*, as no longer shall Europe impose its will and whims onto the rest of the world. The 'post' here would be about transcending the past and committing once and for all to the spirit and letter of multilateralism.

Yet politics have a knack for not following the best laid plans. Empires may ebb and flow but imperial patterns are never far from the surface of the international order. Arguably, the Cold War offered a post-colonial re-ordering around the confrontation of two modern empires, while the post-cold war reawakened the mindset and practices of older empires, not least the universalizing impulse in Europe. In the process, and as discussed in this book, some of these old reflexes have come back to the fore on the European stage, at first incrementally, and then intensely with the Eurocrisis. If we are far from the 'spiritual unity' proclaimed behind the post-war drive to create 'Eurafrika' as a third geopolitical pole between U.S. and Soviet ambitions, we still must ask whether colonialism is not part of Europe's DNA (Behr, 2007, Nicolaidis et al, 2014).

To be sure, the relevance of the trope of 'empire' to the twenty-first century is not all or even mostly due to the old continent. Instead, and with 9/11, "Empires that once seemed to belong in one of history's many dustbins—an outmoded form of politics, to be studied only through traces left across the shattered landscapes of their former subject peoples," have come to seem contentious, interesting, highly topical, and perhaps, not all bad (Pagden 2006). From its policing of the free world during the Cold War, to the drive to combat militant Islamist terrorism, the United States resurrected the spectre of imperialism for some, rehabilitating the imperial promise of order for others.<sup>1</sup> Wherever one stands vis-à-vis the renewed salience of empire, it is clear that Europe has played the side-kick in this new version of imperialism through conquest and battle.

Yet the story of Europe's imperial leanings is also more than derivative of evolving Western interventionism. 'Empire,' for better or worse, has become a watchword in Europe's dealings with its close or far away neighbors, as well as in its relations with former colonies, from the resurrection of the lens of 19<sup>th</sup> century standards of civilisation to denunciations of 'neo-colonialism.'<sup>2</sup> But the eurocrisis also seems to have brought the colonial trope closer to home. Here then we find another meaning of 'post'-imperial – this time post as reproduction of prior patterns recycled under a new discourse. Hence, the notion of 'post' when affixed to the 'imperial' or the 'colonial' (terms which we will use interchangeably) answers to two rather different definitions: the first 'post' as in dealing with and transcending Europe's colonial past; the second 'post' as in reproducing its imperial legacy whether or not the pattern is denied or celebrated.

We can perhaps better understand the relationship between these two readings by recalling Behr's contribution to this volume in which, via a genealogy of its Latin significations, we recognize that 'empire' itself is a site of polysemy. Starting with John Darwin's definition of imperialism "as the sustained effort to assimilate a country or region to the political, economic or cultural system of another power" we can posit that empires are always one way or another characterised by centre-periphery relations whereby through more or less coercive inducements, the centre seeks to govern the periphery 'at a distance' following Hartmut Behr's apt characterization. But in doing so, there is always a gradation between different expressions of the imperial from material to ideational. At one end of the spectrum, the imperial is a mode of governance, a description of manifest actions aimed at

ensuring the security and prosperity of metropolises through some combination of co-optation and coercion of their more or less loosely interconnected peripheries. At the other end of the spectrum, imperial is a state of mind, a sensibility inculcated by habits of imperial governance to be sure – and hence most often and most prominently encountered in conjunction with imperial might – but also often outlasting the very imperial machineries by which imperial mindsets were initially engendered.

This capacity of imperialistic sensibilities to outlive empire recalls the Gramscian notion of hegemony later appropriated by the likes of Foucault, Said, Bhabha, and Chakrabarty in their readings of the enduring power of dominant groups to “shape conceptions of the normal” as Manners has it, to the exclusion or detriment of others (Diez 2013, 194). Thus, while the imperial mindset is a function of colonialism, it can continue to reverberate long after the demise of empire. After all, imperial governance is about management of security, economic, and political affairs, whereas imperial sensitivities, though engendered by imperial management, become woven into the woof of individual and collective psychologies, memories, aspirations, and fears. These have a life of their own and can be affected by multiple factors that are dissonant with the ‘real world’ balance of power (e.g. denial, insecurity, egoism, and indeed concrete factors like an insulated geography or full treasury). In the case of Europe, the enduring resonance of the imperial is of course also a function of the fact that European decline is relative not absolute. After all, and in no small measure due to capital accumulated as a result of colonialism, European countries enjoy levels of development and welfare as well as an embedded-ness in international institutions that ensure enduring if diminished influence in international affairs.

Crucially, this persistence of imperial capacities and logics is a result of the fact that Europeans’ historical successes were enabled by resources and labour appropriated from the world ‘without.’ This is a basic historical fact documented in a flourishing body of interdisciplinary scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Yet, narratives of the EU’s foundation and purpose have been remarkably resistant to acknowledging this co-constitution of the internal and the external. Our argument in this chapter is predicated on this recognition, for any understanding of Europe’s post-imperial condition must grapple with the historical reality that imperialism – whether it is to be transcended or reproduced – was a two-way street. Thus, while one can analytically disaggregate between internal and external manifestations of the post-imperial condition, it is necessary to remain cognizant of their interconnection.

In this chapter, we start with the assumption that while the discussion as to whether or to what extent the EU ought to be characterised as ‘empire’ is a fruitful and productive one, we can take some of the axioms developed in this book as given (see also *inter alia* Zielonka, 2006). We argue first that Europe as embodied in today’s EU is best characterised by its post-imperial condition, that is, the tension between its aspiration to transcend or overcome its imperial legacies on one hand, and its propensity to reproduce and project these legacies on the other; and second that in doing so, scholars need to make more explicit the relationship between internal and external imperial patterns. On both these counts, our ambition is to propose a way of framing the question that occupies the editors and contributors to this volume rather than offer a satisfactory treatment thereof. We ask how the EU has dealt with its post-imperial condition over time, and what normative guidelines could help it do so better. Revisiting our recent argument on the analogy between the 19th-century standard of civilization and the EU’s relations with the rest of the world, we suggest that the EU’s narratives and modes of actions today have only partially succeeded in dealing with its hegemonic hangover (Nicolaidis 2014).<sup>4</sup> We do not know whether internal or external imperial patterns reinforce or mitigate each other. Thus, the definitive reconfiguration of international order away from Europe paradoxically may lead to the reassertion of imperial tendencies internally, as the great powers within Europe retrench and regroup. By the same

token, its ability in a number of arenas to transcend imperial habits internally can have ramifications for the EU's engagement of its neighbours and the broader world.

We first defend the idea that the EU has long embarked on a post-imperial project that is indeed grounded on a commitment to non-domination internally as well as externally. Second, we show that this project has in part failed both within and without, because old habits die hard, and because of evolving internal and external conjectural factors. Finally, we ask how the EU may best deal with its post-imperial condition – namely pursue a “decentering agenda” – by focusing on the cases of Turkey and Ukraine.

### **‘Post’ as Transcendence: Non Domination and Equality**

In some ways, today's EU project can still be defined against an imperialism it sought to escape more than half a century ago. At one level, this has to do with the continent itself, a continent that has hovered for two millennia between various forms of fragmentation and (imperial) union from Rome to Byzantine, Holy Roman to Soviet, Habsburg to Ottoman and eventually to Nazi Europe. A second imperial strand is located ‘beyond the seas’, as some would say, with Europeans’ ‘compulsive colonialism’ driven as Juan Rossi pithily puts it, by the ‘endemic illness’ of a minuscule continent's pathological need to expand (Rossi 2015). Clearly, however, these two ancestral godparents were not represented equally at the side of the EU cradle: the former would be transcended, the latter all but denied. Faced with these various modes of remembering and forgetting, scholars can be forgiven when they disagree on the referent for ‘Europe's Empires’ (Marks, 2012 vs Hansen and Jonsson 2013). What matters for our purposes is how the two are related.

The mainstream reading of the birth of the EU is that of a continental anti-hegemonic project, a rejection of previous hegemonic attempts at unification which have characterized the aftermath of Europe's wars for a millennium (Lacroix and Nicolaidis, 2010). Yet, as Jan Zielonka, Gary Marks and others have cogently argued, this would entail reproducing elements of former European Empires – including above all the Holy Roman variant from the late medieval to the late Baroque period when the *translatio imperii* had all but disappeared in favour of distributed sovereignty. In post-World War II Europe, peace would require not only the taming of nationalism in general, with Europe's peoples giving up on self-realisation through ‘othering’ and sharing sovereignty instead, but also a more concrete set of mechanisms to contain the historical appetite for power on the part of the big states (Magnette and Nicolaidis, 2005). The people of France or Germany *qua states* would be constrained by the new institutional arrangements making it impossible to subjugate other countries or the continent as a whole. And EU institutions would ensure that even as of when the threat of war would recede, the norm of non-domination *among peoples* would remain.

The EU therefore can be seen as creating an institutionalized balance of power among states to ensure non-subordination between them. Coalitions and negotiations have replaced alliances and bandwagoning to entrench the balance in a web of institutionalised distribution of roles and rules of behaviour (e.g. rotating presidency of the Council, disproportionate representation and vote in the Commission, Parliament and Council). And as the stakes for Europe changed from the survival of states to the autonomy of its peoples, shifting our analytical prism from the major key of IR to the minor key of democratic theory, the imperative of inter-state non domination is translated into its republican requisite to ban the exercise of arbitrary power of one person against another (Pettit 1997). The EU, with its referenda, elections and polls sets up a dynamic of peoples checking peoples as it were, predicated on the sense on the part of its citizens that the common project assumes their equality irrespective of the size and power of their member state of origin.

In theory then, as well as in juridical practice, the EC-EU project set into motion a fundamental transformation from an imperial to an federal *genus*, grounded on formal equality between states and the politics of emulation; this meant in turn trading in the imperial centre seeking to govern other Europeans ‘at a distance’ for federal shared governance or governing ‘together.’

It is this transformation and its translation in political and democratic terms that the nascent literature on demoi-cratic theory seeks to capture building on the broader literature on European integration while emphasizing the technologies of pluralism embedded therein.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, the EU is a flawed but nevertheless tentative demoi-cracy in the making, i.e. a union of peoples who govern together but not as one. These people have sought to refine what Joseph Weiler (2001) called *constitutional tolerance* through the co-mingling of their democratic orders by choice, a choice that needs to be seen as ultimately reversible through permissible exit. Admittedly, we encounter here the elasticity of the notion of ‘Empire’. With this version of the EU, we are far from classic Empires in a polity where the question of final authority is still left open and heterarchy reigns such that the EU is a ‘networks of elements in which each element shares the same horizontal position of power and authority’ (Halberstram 2009). In this regard, as noted above, we are very close to the kind of neo-medieval form of empire discussed by Jan Zielonka, with diffuse and overlapping authority. And yet, the analogy is incomplete at best simply because empires pre-dated the democratic age. The EU has had to develop a political form that combines that of multi-centric Empire (or empire without domination) with democratic anchoring in its separate and autonomous states. It may be no surprise that it has not quite succeeded in doing so - a point to which we come back.

The second part of the story of the EU’s birth and growth under the shadow of its past is more invisible yet critical: the ways the ‘outside,’ namely the overseas colonial inheritance, contributed to the construction of the ‘inside’ and vice versa. Confronting the second legacy, we suggest, has been subordinated to the first, and yet the efficacy of EU agency in the world depends upon its recognition. The self-appointment of the EU as a ‘credible force for good’ in international relations, as Solana, its first foreign policy representative once declared, depends upon a core axiom: the need for consistency between the two sides of the coin. While the creation of the EC was in part about forgetting the colonial past of these member states and more generally abstaining from the global stage, this imperative for consistency must permeate its progressive return to this very stage since the 1970s and more forcefully with the end of the cold war.

Indeed, the standard story of the reinvention of Europe as a normative project from the earliest days of the EC to its progressive assertion as a ‘civilian’ or ‘normative’ power in the last two decades, rested on what the EU was trying to do *inside*: sticking to its now localized ambition to civilise Europe rather than the world. After a civil war exported to the world, unilateral universalism could no longer be sold as benign whether as a justificatory discourse for colonialism or as a guide for external action after decolonisation (Nicolaidis 2015). Instead the EU dealt with mundane issues like trade liberalisation, competition rule and product standards. As a different kind of polity internally, it could be a different kind of actor externally: if it was to enlarge it would be ‘by invitation,’ if it was to export standards, it would be by persuasion. Subjugation of non-Europeans could not be part of the story.

This self-image and the practices by which it was accompanied were underwritten by both the structure and the spirit of the times. After all, the pursuit of inclusive practices was bolstered politically and economically by United States involvement in Europe’s reconstruction and, above all, by its guarantee of a permissive security environment as part and parcel of deterrence of the Soviet Union in the wake of the Berlin crisis. This meant that nascent pan-European institutions did not even develop the capacity for post- or neo-imperial power projection in military terms. The US security vision for the region as part of its broader

policy of containment also necessitated coalition-building in the fight against the Warsaw Pact. An outcome of this for European ability to internalize difference was the co-option of both Greece and Turkey – on an equal footing at the beginning – through the parallel evolution of Marshall plan and NATO arrangements and European Economic Community Association Agreements etc. Tellingly, posters from the era promoting the Marshall plan, display the Greek and Turkish flags at the heart of a reconstructed European body politic – semiotics that are hard to imagine today.

If the Marshall Plan and NATO fed the dynamic of European integration and expansion by allowing inclusive enlargement (the very nexus of the ‘within’ and the ‘without’) to become the almost sole focus of Europe’s foreign policy, they also directly enabled the EU (if not all its member states) to devote the lion’s share of their budgets to non-security concerns. The ensuing economic surplus, in turn, served European southern enlargement towards the new Mediterranean democracies. If the enlargement process was reminiscent of imperial practices as some of us have argued (Behr 2007; Nicolaidis & Fisher Onar 2013), this would be redeemed by the equal status awaiting the members to be.

Meanwhile, as decolonization – the *de jure* transcendence of Europe’s imperial legacy – unfolded across the 1960s and 1970s, a certain post-imperial sense of solidarity with the nascent nation-states of Africa and Asia infused youth and (left) intellectual cadres many of whom would go on to become national and EU-level leaders.<sup>6</sup> In this way, affective and intellectual bases for a ‘decentered agenda’ transcendent of the imperial past as opposed to hierarchical engagement of the extra-European world were in evidence early on in the European project, although they were by no means the dominant key.

By the 1990s-2000s the apparent transcendence of empire gained momentum as the EU took in a host of member states whose histories and sensitivities pluralized the post-imperial ambition. Indeed the sixteen new member states which have joined since the end of the cold-war, not only doubled the surface of the EU but turned it into a space of many former colonies. As Dimitar Bechev (2014) observes, the EU now includes Malta and Cyprus which were British colonial possessions as recently as the early 1960s, while for many of the new Eastern European members the memory of imperial satellite status vis-à-vis the Soviet Union is barely more than two decades old. Radical differences between dominant historical legacies of imperial rule not only distinguish ‘Europe’ from ‘non-Europe’ but Europeans among themselves. We are not even facing an East-West divergence within the EU echoing the Iron curtain, since member states like Ireland and Greece have had their own experience with foreign domination. But eastern and southeastern Europe might have a special role to play when it comes to the transcendence of Europe’s imperial past in the eyes of the rest of the world (Davies, 1996). For, as argued by Bechev, the ‘return to Europe’ of the ‘lands between’ is all the more powerful insofar as they still carry the seal of the continent’s not-too-distant imperial identities and host the relics of the pre-Soviet empires as well form the Habsburgs to the Ottoman, Romanov, Holy Roman, Byzantine, and Venetian imperial projects, among others. Indeed, ‘the region has also been the graveyard of the imperial idea as the original target of the Wilsonian principle of self-determination – the very principle which is so influential in the emergence of Third World independence movements challenging the dominance of European colonial powers’ (Bechev 2015). Hence, and even though from the outside, the EU is often as little more than its big member states, part of the post-imperial promise lies with its own engagement with its internal diversity and its capacity to offer a more polyphonic sensitivity on the global stage (Macaj and Nicolaidis 2014).

### **‘Post’ as Reproduction: Europe’s Colonial Temptations**

Yet, there was always an important twist to the mainstream story of the EU's birth and development. That is that the post-imperial challenge does not stop at eschewing direct horizontal domination between countries. With greater interdependence and increasingly centralised competences, the risk of domination has slowly reasserted itself in another guise, as vertical. For fear of dominance by a Napoleon, members have given up power to Brussels. And due to the congruence of functional and political pressures as European integration and enlargement unfolded over decades - and then dramatically with the eurocrisis - the three safeguards against neo-imperialism which characterised integration at its beginnings have been progressively and partially eroded: namely, that the competences thus transferred be circumscribed; that the central authority be collectively owned and controlled by its many component states; and that the strongest countries be equally bound by collective constraints. Certainly, these are demanding safeguards: as pre-1865 US federalists so passionately reminded their contemporaries, when power is transferred from the units to a new centre - however 'decentralized' this centre may be - it is always prone to capture by permanent majorities or otherwise tyrannical agents. And indeed, Europe today runs the risk - the old Kantian fear - of embracing classic federal state domination in order to escape classic imperial domination, drifting from the *Charybdis* of horizontal domination to the *Scylla* of vertical domination (Nicolaidis 2013).<sup>7</sup>

Crucially the risk is always that one country may capture the centre and thus conflate horizontal and vertical domination. This is what many believe has happened with Germany's role in Europe in the wake of the Eurozone crisis. But given Germany's own inclinations, we cannot and should not easily brandish the imperialist bogymen. To be sure, this is not a story where power disappears. If the normative ideal of European democracy is to transcend the *pathologies* of anarchy (as the core characteristic of the international realm) but not the *nature* of anarchy as a horizontal ordering of power, the ideal calls for taming the exercise of power without indulging the teleological belief that power asymmetries can be abolished or wished away. Democracy is an exercise in power mitigation not denial. As theorists of the English school like Bull and Wright would have it, international order, i.e. peace, demands that we put power to work, that collective expectations be built and institutionalized to entrench 'great power responsibility.' In an order characterized by the rule of law, be it domestic or international, it is the arbitrary use of power that needs to be curbed not power *per se* (Walker & Palombella 2009, Nicolaidis and Kleinfeld, 2012). This is all the more true in a proto-democratic EU, which encompasses countries with great asymmetries in their wealth and demographics. This is not a realm of absolutes and power cannot be wished away. The idea was simple and powerful: with power comes responsibility rather than domination. The answer remains as always: *how* is this disproportionate power exercised?

One of the great lessons of the eurocrisis is that national democracies interacting under conditions of interdependence tread a fine line between the legitimate forging of shared commitments to keep the common show on the road and the arbitrary use of centralised powers to impose duties and obligations and thus prescribe the rules of cooperation the critical difference is what we can term the *single standpoint* (Bohman 2007 and 2008). That single standpoint can be national, ideological, technocratic or some combination thereof. Indeed it has long been clear that freedom as non-domination was far from embedded in the political culture of some of the larger Member States, often subject to a pervasive Gulliver syndrome (Magnette and Nicolaidis 2005). Many in France in particular never quite gave up on the neo-imperial dream of the EU as France-writ-large. But the eurocrisis has magnified this pathology, creating new patterns of soft domination on the part not only of Germany but also of northern/creditor states in particular whereby 'governing at a distance' becomes entrenched in EU practices. Their 'governing at a distance' through the Troika for countries under bailout programmes, or through the European Semester for all others at risk, is shaped

by a core belief: that there is a right way of governing irrespective of the local processes that this governing may affect.

Thus, the perceived return of imperialism as reproduction of hierarchical habits in the EU is simply due to the assertion of the will of one or a subset of member states in ways that preempt democratic contestation in the political arena of another. The ability to govern at a distance emanates from a conviction in the creditor-EU of superior economic understandings and technical acumen. But this in turn would not be possible without a decision-making architecture that allows for monolithic choice corresponding to the preferences of parties that do not bare the consequences of these choices. The question is not whether member states collectively and the Commission concurrently in writing their blueprint are legitimately entitled to suggest and design some of the disciplines that will make shared membership in EMU sustainable. The question is rather whether in doing so, they ought to act as if there could be one solution, one ‘right approach’ to macro-economic policy. Institutionalised imperialism becomes possible when legitimized by the technocratic (ordoliberal) belief that economic policy can legitimately be subtracted from politics and the collective resolution of conflict in the democratic sphere where various forces interact.

Some may object that IMF-type conditionality imposed on countries that cannot pay increases the likelihood of their doing so provides a collective good, trust in the global financial system, that is in everyone interest. But however one gauges the conditionality story, the EU was predicated on doing away specific reciprocity or measures targeting specific member countries in favour of disciplines applied to all and agreed in common. The problem with the EU today is once removed. Namely, it is that this conditionality logic with its neo-imperial undertones of governing at a distance has captured EU institutions themselves, thus conflating two hitherto separate logics, namely that of conditionality and that of polity-building (Nicolaidis and Watson 2014). Arguably, governing at a distance might be legitimate in temporary states of exception created by unsustainable sovereign debt. But the merger in question has sought to make permanent some elements of conditionality that are highly intrusive, and were forged in the heat of the moment. Hard cases make bad law, unless great care is taken; and the stress of crisis resolution is not an easy setting in which to shape a new permanent architecture for EMU that does not impose a single country’s will. Conditionality implies an intrusiveness – and fosters a divisiveness – that do not belong in the operating process of a post-imperial European polity over the long run: to confuse these short- and long-run disciplines, embedding conditionality mechanisms as part of EMU governance in normal times, is a kind of structural merger fraught with political risks.

This story is not only one about the standards that pertain to shared governance in Europe. It relates in fact to a more fundamental dimension that resides in the perceptions, frustrations and fears of European publics. To pick only one theatre, it may not have been surprising to have witnessed the many variations on accusations of German neo-imperialism (sic) in the Greek media (Nicolaidis *et al.* 2014). More troubling is the way in which the discourse has capitalized on the Greek collective memory of the Second World War, using images that the Greeks were *already* socialized with to compare Germany’s current ‘peculiar, economic hegemony’<sup>8</sup> with the traumatic wartime Nazi Occupation. The Greek posture at least in some quarters has been squarely framed as one of resistance against foreign domination, urging Germany, to ‘respect those who sacrificed themselves for the liberation of Germany and humanity from the Nazi yoke.’<sup>9</sup> A typical headline spoke of a ‘suffocating euro-tutelage,’ declaring ‘for the first time, the Commission and the ECB implement a model of perpetual co-government in a member state.’<sup>10</sup> Whatever the merit of these assertions, the question at the heart of Europe’s future today is whether such practices and the sentiments



they give rise to will become entrenched throughout all of debtor-Europe or whether the EU will be able to encourage truly democratically sustainable reforms.

It is indeed fascinating that this question be asked at the very historical moment when global power shifts and the obvious albeit relative ‘provincialisation’ of the EU in the international system that this entails is putting enormous pressure on the member states individually and collectively to compete politically and economically in order to retain a place in the global pecking order. At a time when the German government appears, quite regally, to be ignoring accusations of neo-imperial governing at a distance within Europe, the implication is that creditor hegemony and/or hubris is what it takes if Europeans do not want, one day, to be governed at a distance by the likes of China.

### **What is to be done? The Decentering Agenda**

Elsewhere, we have argued that in order to respond to the pragmatic challenges as well as anxieties engendered by the rise of the ‘Rest’ it is necessary for the EU and its members to ‘decenter’ habits of thinking and behaving that are post-imperial in the sense of reproduction: namely, attitudes emanating from the nineteenth-century era of European global hegemony which continue to situate Europe at the centre of the world’s affairs and at the top of its hierarchy. This lingering post-imperial imagination, we contend, compromises EU engagement of the formerly dominated world, especially in its relations with rising actors on an increasingly multipolar global stage. For such players, the memory of European military and economic dominance and cultural hubris remains aggravating – invoked to potent populist effect in tropes like China’s ‘hundred years of humiliation’ or Iran’s exhortation against ‘Westoxification’ (Fisher Onar and Nicolaidis 2013). The hostilities, suspicions, and mutual recriminations that this engenders - evident in hawkish policies and the soaring of xenophobia in EU countries - in turn, impedes Europeans’ ability to achieve a sense of the post-imperial as transcendence.

To overcome this, we argue for a three-step rubric for ‘decentering’ Europe’s international relations and the analytical apparatus we use in its assessment. The three logics at play have both a sequential and a parallel structure such that each emanates from the former, while all three also can be pursued simultaneously. The first and best-known move as popularized by Chakrabarty is to seek to *provincialize* Europe. At one level, this entails questioning received wisdom about for instance, the uni-directional radiation of civilization on one hand and enlightened modernity on the other to less elevated corners of the world.<sup>11</sup> At another level, it requires recognizing the contribution of others to the flourishing of Europe since at least the early modern era, the legacy of which continues to tangibly empower the EU, its members, and its citizens, and materially disadvantage those who have inherited societies, polities, economies, and ecologies brutalized by European colonialism.<sup>12</sup>

As a second step toward decentering is *engagement*. This means striving to see the world as it looks to others. A seemingly straightforward task, in practice engaging others’ priorities is always tricky. This is because the questions one asks and the interpretations one brings to bear to the answers one receives are always intertwined with one’s own priorities and interests. Thus, while it is a natural starting point to engage by asking what others think of Europe and the EU, one must also be prepared to accept that Europe may figure rather negatively, if at all.

On these grounds, the third step in the decentering agenda is to work toward *reconstruction*. This refers to the need to infuse and invigorate EU policy engagement with knowledge and sensibilities that emanate from extra-European perspectives – as well as those voices of vulnerable groups, often second- or third-generation migrants, within the EU. This more inclusive framework is a functional imperative if one is to retain relevance in a non-

European world pecking order, and a step toward achieving in normative terms the illustrious state that the likes of Solana and Baroso have long evoked as an aspirational ideal, namely alignment of the outside and the inside – what we see as the transcendence rather than the reproduction of Europe’s ‘post-imperial’ condition. To be sure, this does not mean uncritically taking on board all practices and positions put forth by extra- or new-European interlocutors, but rather modulating the EU’s tone and prescriptions toward more fruitful collaborative outcomes.

### ***A Tale of Two Civilizations? Turkey as Europe’s Post-imperial Testing Ground***

The urgency of decentring is attested to by the bungling of Turkey’s EU candidacy, arguably the case *par excellence* of the post-imperial condition as-reproduction trumping – at least for the time being - the post-imperial condition as-transcendence. When Ankara’s formal candidacy to the Union was declared in 1999, however, this did not seem a foregone conclusion (Fisher Onar 2009 and 2015). On the contrary, Turkey’s membership trajectory was widely seen as a litmus test for the inclusionary capacity of the EU project on equality grounds. Would it spur the Union to evolve in a cosmopolitan post-national direction reconciled not only to post-Christian secular difference, but also to Muslim difference however secularized? In other words, would the standards of civilisation mind-set – what on the Turkish side was referred to half facetiously as the ‘Capitulations syndrome,’ referring to nineteenth century quasi-imperial usurpation of aspects of Ottoman sovereignty - be truly overcome? Many, especially within the EU’s liberal and left-leaning political elite and intelligentsia, committed to and mobilized toward substantiating this aspiration. Negotiations toward opening accession negotiations and concomitant reforms in Turkey were embarked upon in apparent good faith along with a plethora of official and civil society exchanges. Budgets were allocated, institutions were established, laws were passed, relationships were forged and, for all appearances, Turkey underwent an EU-oriented transformation. But if this was congruent with a triumphal sense in the early 2000s that the EU was at the threshold of achieving its manifest destiny as an agent of post-imperial transcendence, in practice, relations became increasingly strained.

Resistance was discernible from the start in the reservations expressed by prominent Christian Democrats who nursed civilizational anxieties about Turkey’s prospective membership. It was amplified by the 9/11 attacks and the new zeitgeist they ushered in along with centre-right governments in France and Germany whose leadership courted to some extent the far right that rose to prominence in this period in both national and EU parliamentary politics. Fuelled by the atrocities committed by Islamist extremists in London, Madrid, and Amsterdam, the far right saw Turkish accession as tantamount to handing over the keys of (post-) Christian Europe to an ineluctably expansive and barbaric Islamist bloc, lambasting, moreover, the EU-level accession process as just one more instance of anti-democratic excess on the part of culturally deracinated EU political elites.

In time, if not necessarily as colourfully as in its far-right articulation, the view of Europe as a geocultural bloc prevailed, the ‘post-imperial’ condition as reproduction of exclusionary hierarchies by which we can characterise much European engagement of countries like Turkey or Egypt and the perceived impossibility of their meaningful integration with the West. To be sure, not all of Europe’s geocultural ‘Others’ are Muslim: Russia and the United States also have served this role at various junctures (Neumann 1999; Morozov and Rumelili 2013). Nor are all Muslims perceived through the same prism. Muslim minority communities in European societies, for example, may be read through a somewhat less securitized optic than, for example, states and societies in Muslim-majority countries, and certainly more than

Islamist-led governments of Muslim-majority states. Proximity, size, and level of development also matter. Hence, Albania is envisaged as – eventually – internalisable, while the mantra beloved of those sceptical of Turkey's EU trajectory has long been that the country was 'too large, too poor, and too Muslim' for inclusion. The appeal of the refrain (despite Turkey's rapid economic development in the interim) is suggestive of the interplay between the post-imperial and Western conditions, in that Turkey is deemed too alien to even be 'governed from afar.' That Turkey's detractors in Europe would rather forfeit enduring influence over and potentially alienate an important ally than work through the existential anxieties that the country's candidacy evokes suggests that the post-imperial vis-à-vis Europe's own neighbourhood is at some operative level bound up in the memory not only of empire as the overseas colonial projects of the 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but also earlier Holy Roman incarnations of European *imperium*.

The Turkish case also speaks to the fallout for European foreign policy of this mixed bag imperial heritage. For the opening and then *de facto* if not formal closing of the window of accession, accompanied and sometimes set off a series of developments in Turkey, from partial democratization in the mid-2000s driven by a party with political Islamist roots, to the capture of the state by that same party by the end of the decade (Oktem 2011). As the prospect of EU accession dimmed, and outreach to Turkey's own post-imperial neighbourhood - the Ottoman successor states of the Balkans and Middle East - proved fruitful, Ankara began to position itself as a multi-regional actor (Oktem, Kadioğlu, Karli 2012). Increasingly, this entailed evocation of civilizational rationales wholly congruent with the tale of Turkey as Europe's Other being articulated within the EU but inversed, casting Turkey as the authentic and benign hegemon the region had been waiting for to rescue its denizens from European double-standards and exploitation. While this claim has proved more aspirational than practicable in the aftermath of the Arab revolutions and the uncertainties they have unleashed, it does testify to the unintended consequences of failure to confront the tension between Europe's post-imperialism and Turkey's 'western condition' or the unavoidable nature of its western trope (Akkoyunlu et al. 2013). By not confronting its post-imperial condition in enlargement policy, and not withstanding the limits of its influence over a government with increasing authoritarian tendency, the EU has failed to enlist a crucial partner at a time of great flux in their shared neighbourhood.

### ***Neighbourhood as the Limes of Empire: For a Right not to Choose?***

If relations with Turkey have soured for the time being, the EU's post-colonial credentials could perhaps best be tested in what it has come to call its eastern neighbourhood, where countries that are not candidates for accession belong to a shared neighbourhood between Russia and the EU. Perhaps more accurately, these countries now constitute not a shared but a contested neighbourhood in the full senses of the term, a grey zone made up by the limes (the outer limits of the empire as they were called by the Romans) between two powers with very different relations to their colonial legacies. Whatever their contradictory aspirations, this is a structural fact not a Russian ploy: countries in the contested neighbourhood are culturally, ethnically and ideologically in between. Indeed while each in different ways, these countries are all divided between a 'pro-EU' (and not just western) side, which hankers after the kind of rise in prosperity witnessed in Poland (Knaus, 2014), and the eastern pro-Russia side, often suspicious of what they see as European values as well as promises. Accordingly, countries like Azerbaijan, Byelorussia or Armenia resist the EU's eastern partnership, seemingly perceiving it as an instance of post-imperial reproduction.

Should the EU and Russia confront each other in this region as classic imperial powers each vying to keep or expand its respective sphere of influence? The latest crisis in Ukraine is but one expression of this broader question due to a great extent to the combination between two gaps: the gap between the parts of the populations who want to join the EU and those drawn to Russia (and all those in between); and the gap between the aspiration of the former and the EU's propensity to deliver on these aspirations. As Borosz's account in this volume reminds us, Ukraine's membership in the European Union is off the table for the foreseeable future – but this has not kept the country from being torn apart.

We believe that a truly post-imperial approach for the EU needs to start by rejecting the old spheres of influence approach – something the EU has proclaimed it was doing all along while often acting as if it didn't. Is it enough to claim or even clumsily practice a 'transformative approach' in the region, committed to exporting all good things from democracy to rational economic governance and the rule of law that underpins it all, while ignoring both the colonial underpinnings of the approach and the geo-political context of such (desirable) transformation? As argued by Elena Korosteleva as well as contributors in this volume, the neighborhood policy may have had the right intentions but the means by which it has been conducted in the last decade have been overwhelmingly Eurocentric and paternalistic (Korosteleva 2015).<sup>13</sup> The EU's approach has often overlooked the deeply entrenched cleavages in most of these countries and assumed that an external power could simply empower pro-western parties or certain actors within this camp without destabilizing effects. Pragmatically, the EU needs to truly shape a new and decentered approach to relations on its eastern front including by choosing instruments that empower actors for change who are most capable of mediating conflicts, from societal to military.

On the geopolitical front, Russia must be confronted in its claim that it alone respects the diverse make up of its former satellites. One way for the EU to do so is to visibly uphold a principle akin to a *right not to choose* for countries in the region. By this we mean not just a *de facto* right – as help by any sovereign country - but a proclaimed policy on the part of the EU, pro-actively pursued with all concerned. Such a right would likely be perceived as a stabilising factor and serve the unity of Europe's divided neighbours.

Is such a right akin to a general call for neutrality in the contested neighbourhood? No. But it would be reminiscent of the third world philosophy of non-alignment promulgated in the heydays of decolonisation. As a post-imperial move, it would mean giving full agency to middle states so that they themselves determine the localised order which affects them. By explicitly maximising their room for manoeuvre between their intrusive imperial neighbours, such a right not to choose would turn them from objects of hegemony to the shapers of a space within a dual hegemony with and overlapping realms. To be sure, competition between the two hegemons would not necessarily relent but these in-between states would be put in a position to design schemes for mutual accommodation rather than be forced to balance against either side.

Specifically, a right not to choose implies for the EU to abandon the enlargement model in dealing with its neighbours – at least while the prospect of enlargement is inexistent- a model that systematically connects access and convergence, rewarding the latter through access to market, visas and eventually membership. This is an approach based on a concentric circle vision of 'more or less members' with Brussels at its centre.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, a right not to choose would involve taking the full political import of trade negotiations, which appear as technical and are led by technical experts. Apparently, in discussions on the trade agreement with Ukraine, the EU did encourage Russia to consider adapting its approach so that its Eurasian customs union (or a version thereof) would allow individual members to negotiate their own separate trade deals. But while technically the EU was reassuring Russia that it could handle a deep free trade agreement

between the EU and Ukraine, it failed to show how this was to happen or to frame it this way politically. Not before the spring of 2014, as the war on the eastern front was already raging, did EU institutions start examining seriously the possibility of amending their own approach in this regard. The technicality of EU trade policy and its character as trade lawyers' *domaine réservé* – as if the 'standards' were somehow a uniquely rationale and a-political matter of governance - constitutes a serious structural weakness for the EU when accords and political goals are increasingly at odds. In this case, it is indeed the content of the trade deal that ratcheted up the Russian threat.

This right not to choose is of course not incompatible with EU convergence and ultimately a right to choose their partners for these countries. Is it not better for the EU to frame the relationship as 'not choosing' and actually seeing support for reforms? To be sure, there will be questioning in the future as to whether the reforms that may occur in these countries are the product of external EU pressure under expectations of eventual accession or internally devised structural change with EU and other support. But a post-imperial EU still needs to pursue its interests as with any other 'normal' actor in the international system and remains in the business of exporting stability: be visible on the ground, cooperate on border control, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction as well as the creation of a common communication space. If and when the countries to Europe's east chose to converge and demonstrate that they are able to, their choice needs not be a choice *against* Russia. Indeed, Putin's Russia, like that of a purportedly 'neo-Ottoman' Turkey alienated from its EU prospects, has its own vision of the post-colonial, and that is harping back to an earlier era (the Concert of Vienna) in which Russia is again a key player. The EU needs to convey strongly that it itself has embraced a new era where the big players cannot tell smaller ones what to do and when the security of people as well as states is paramount. Only such a precept ought to underpin a new security pact from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have reflected on what we call Europe's post-imperial condition, which calls for Europeans to reflect on how deeply rooted in colonial patterns was the original project of European integration, and on why many chose to forget this. We also need to recognize the different and multiple meanings of the 'imperial past' which prevail in countries in east and central Europe, southern or northern Europe as well as in former European former colonies who see the EU through the lens of their own postcolonial status. It is the confrontation between these imperial legacies and the difficulty to transcend them by recognizing then and now the critical role of 'others' within and without in the constitution of the EU project which forge Europe's post-imperial condition. Our notion of the post-imperial as both transcendence and as reproduction, and the modalities, dangers, and promise of each on the internal and external playing fields, suggests that while the EU has made much formal and indeed existential progress toward confronting echoes of imperialism, imperial patterns die hard.

Post-colonial studies used to have their object squarely located in the world of the 'subaltern' along the paths opened by the likes of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and many others. Many of the symbolic and effective types of oppression which they unveiled and fought, still exist. But the echoes are fainter and more confusing than in their immediately postcolonial times. Power is more diffuse and hybridity more pervasive. Europe has moved on by denying, reproducing and atoning for its pasts in equal measure. We need to update talk of the postcolonial condition for a changing world and confront Europe's claims to post-imperialism. In the end, the EU may have become an Empire in new clothes but let us hope this may come to be a post-imperial Empire.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For a masterful account of the modalities of (Anglo-)American imperial amnesia and memory as seen from the Indian Ocean, see Engseung Ho, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, seminal work on this of Behr 2007 and Stivachtis, 2008. See also Nicolaidis, Sebe and Maas 2015.

<sup>3</sup> In the field of international relations, the work of John Hobson (e.g. 2007; 2012) stands as perhaps the most cogent articulation of this ‘mutual constitution’ of Europe and its colonies and the indebtedness of the former to the latter.

<sup>4</sup> In Nicolaidis et al. 2014 we discuss the analogy between 19<sup>th</sup> century standards of civilization and today’s EU along two dimensions. *Agency denial* or the tendency to deny agency to new members in different domains not only in determining the rules applicable to them but also in determining who was to have agency in the first place; and *Hierarchy* or the inequality that exists where some agents systematically have more power than others and are institutionally recognised to have higher worth. While we find significant variation along these dimensions, we conclude that there is little doubt that the SoC mindset and practices are alive and well.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Besson, 2006; Bohman 2007; Cheneval, and Schimmelfennig, 2013; Cheneval, Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2014, Nicolaidis 2004, 2012, 2013

<sup>6</sup> This trend, exemplified by Sartre’s engagement of Fanon, was about recognizing that the post-imperial condition involved the mutually constitutive role of internal and external dynamics. As Aimé Césaire put it at the heyday of mid-century decolonization, imperialism had ‘worked to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the world.’ (cited in Vergès, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> There is a subtle difference between these two classic forms and their more EU-compatible cousins (federal union and neo-medieval empire).

<sup>8</sup> *Avgi* 06/01/10, p. 8, ‘Schäuble Adds Insult to Injury.’

<sup>9</sup> *Avgi* 06/01/10, pp. 8-9, ‘The German Economics Minister Appears “Provocative” and ‘Insolent.’

<sup>10</sup> *Avgi* 10/01/10, front page.

<sup>11</sup> There is an expansive literature on what Blaut (1999) was among the first to call this diffusionist tendency. For a recent discussion see Jan-Görg Deutsch, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> For a literature review including the notable contributions of John Hobson to the IR variant of the argument see Fisher Onar and Nicolaidis, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> See also Bechev and Nicolaidis, JCMS 2010.

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